

TO: The Veterans' Affairs Committee

RE: Public Hearing for CGA cadet loophole

Dear Committee members,

I am writing you concerning the new bill to not include CGA cadets in the CT Veteran's Tuition Waiver.

I was in the Academy class of 2007. I reported to the Academy June of 2003 from Southern California. I did not like the majors at the academy per se; however, I desperately wanted to be an Officer. I was at the Academy for over 3 years when I was discharged in September 2006 for degenerative bilateral sensory neuro hearing loss. I now wear hearing aids in both ears and my hearing continues to get worse.

The Academy medically discharged me because they were afraid I would not hear a fire alarm and they thought I was a liability. They gave me little notice to leave and since I was from CA, I had no family to run to and live with in CT. I immediately took advantage of the tuition waiver and was able to graduate with my Bachelor's degree weeks before my academy class graduated, all while working 3 jobs and struggling to stay on my feet after sudden discharge.

The problem, however, was that I would have had to do another 2 years of undergrad to get an engineering or math degree from another college. I transferred with 110 credits, which is about what you need to graduate with a Bachelor's degree. I ended up having to get my Bachelors in General Studies and use my engineering classes as electives in order to graduate on time. This was hard for me because had I not gone to the Academy I might have gone to Medical School and being discharged from there my senior year forced me to get a General Studies degree. I was very grateful for the Veteran's waiver because without that I would not have been where I am in my studies. If I had not had the waiver I would not have continued in school at that time because I was barely making ends meet as it was, at one point living in my car. I graduate from Grad School in Marriage and Family Therapy this May thanks to the tuition waiver.

I understand where you are going with this bill, I do. I do not think that cadets who are dishonorably discharged should get to go to school for free. That is not right. The other part is that cadets can opt to leave the academy without any commitment up until their third year. That is an honorable discharge and one could argue that it would not be fair for them to go to school for free either. I believe that people like me who were medically discharged especially towards the end should be eligible for the waiver. My first class summer before I was discharged I was stationed at Sector New York, working operationally for the Coast Guard. If you put all my time together between my summers that were operational, I served "active duty" for more than 90 days. Yes, the academy is mostly school, however, we have endless training on the Coast Guard all throughout the

year and serve during the summers and bottom line is that cadets are active duty military personnel. I am not sure how you would write the bill to make it fair, I just wanted to share my story to give you an idea of the complexity this bill poses for some people.

Lastly, I have been thinking of getting my doctorate, would I be grandfathered or is that most likely not an option at this point? By all of the sudden implementing this bill, people who are already using the Veteran's waiver will be affected. I do not think it is fair for this to affect people's plans that have already mapped out their college future.

I agree this loophole should be closed; however, it is important to go about it in the right way. If you have any questions please call as I am passionate about this subject matter.

Very Respectfully,

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